

**Report on  
THE ARTS DISTRICT GENERAL MEETING  
May 9, 2015  
Common Council Chambers, City Hall**

Our meeting on May 9 was in three parts:

- 1) Reiterating the purpose of developing an Arts District in Midtown,
- 2) A summary of what the organizing committee found about Arts Districts in other cities, and
- 3) A breakout session for input by those attending.

**Purpose of developing an Arts District in Midtown**

- 1) Create a focusing theme for revitalizing and uniting the commercial areas of Midtown
- 2) Create a focus for the city as a whole that will help to merge Midtown commercially with the Uptown and Roudout areas
- 3) Create a cultural magnet for drawing both relocators and tourists to the city
- 4) Create a tool for improving the quality of life for the community through  
Mixed-income residential growth,  
Partnerships with education,  
Streetscaping,  
Occupation of underutilized buildings, and  
Employment opportunities

**Summary of Arts Districts in other Cities**

The Arts Districts that we looked at included the following:

**Asheville, NC:** River Arts District (RAD)  
**Bloomington, IN:** Bloomington Arts & Entertainment District (BEAD)  
**Cleveland, OH:** Gordon Square  
**Cumberland, MD:** Arts & Entertainment District  
**Denver, CO:** River North (RiNo)  
**Indianapolis, IN:** Fountain Square  
**Little Rock, AR:** Argent Arts District  
**Milwaukee, WI:** Historic Third Ward  
**New Orleans, LA:** Warehouse Arts District  
**Oklahoma City, OK:** Paseo Arts District  
**Paducah, KY:** Lower Town  
**Raleigh, NC:** Warehouse District  
**St. Paul, MN:** Creative Enterprise Zone

We found in studying the development of these Districts many similarities to Kingston, which made us realize just how many pieces are already in place for developing our own Arts District.

Most Arts Districts started either

In older, declining industrial and warehouse areas with underutilized buildings,  
In decaying neighborhoods with abandoned housing, or  
In retail corridors that had been abandoned for outlying shopping malls.

Decaying warehouses presented the opportunity of cheap rent for artist housing and studios and for factory spaces for arts-related industries.

In the Lower Town area of **Paducah, KY**, for example, the city had on its hands a burdensome load of abandoned houses. A nationally advertised **artist relocation program** in 2000 brought artists from all over the country to buy the houses for a nominal fee and rehab them with help from a unique partnership of local government and local lending institutions. By 2010 the area could boast 1000 new jobs, 234 new businesses, 119 rehabbed businesses, and a vacancy rate that went from 70% to 14%.

In **Asheville, NC**, Highwater Clays, set up shop in 1979 in a blighted warehouse area by the river. Over time, this **ceramic supply business attracted artists, galleries and music venues**. In 1985 the River Arts District was established. In 1994, Highwater Clays expanded and converted a row of old warehouses into the Odyssey Ceramics Center. Much of the early growth was done without outside funding. But the attraction of the District had an influence on the revival of the rundown downtown commercial area, and in 2010 funding from the city and state prompted further growth of the RAD area.

In **Cleveland, OH**, the Gordon Arts District was initiated when **3 rundown theaters formed a non-profit organization** that spurred a \$30 million capital fund campaign that has resulted in 80 new businesses and 5 theater companies drawing 100,000 patrons a year.

In **Cumberland, MD**, another **artist relocation incentives program** was part of a revitalization strategy that partnered the visual and performing arts with historic preservation, tourism, and growth in technology business.

### **What Midtown Kingston has that makes it so ripe for an Arts District**

**Performing arts:** UPAC presenting music, dance, theater, and classic films

**Artist studio spaces:** Shirt Factory, Brush Factory, Pajama Factory buildings

**Artist housing:** Lace Mill building with 55 units of affordable artist housing

**Artist businesses:** Bailey Ceramic Supply, R&F Handmade Paints, two art materials manufacturers with international customer bases, an art store, and numerous other crafts businesses.

**Media Center:** Seven21 Media Center

**Commercial strip:** the Broadway corridor linking the thriving Rondout and Stockade Districts

**Arts education:** Kingston High School with a high caliber innovative visual and performing arts program and a strong track records of involvement with community and businesses.

**Link to Festivals:** Art and ethnic festivals take place in different parts of the city. Having an Arts District in Midtown will help to make those and other arts activities more of city-wide events.

### **Break out session**

The breakout sessions involved enthusiastic discussion that focused largely on the need to communicate and collaborate with the community. Here are some of the suggestions:

#### **Branding, character, and identification of the area**

Name for district, MADmile : Midtown Arts District

District should not be residential

Need for green space

Defining the area, where it would start and end using public art and signage

The need to create public art, particularly on the walkway from Lace Mill to UPAC

#### **Reachout to community**

Engaging the whole Midtown community (esp. community leaders) in creating the arts district

Importance of including the community to control gentrification

Murals in Midtown to excite the neighborhood and engage the city in the Arts District idea

Creating exciting events that the immediate area can identify with and engage the entire city:

Pop-up concerts, street art shows (chalk), street performers, street craft/food fairs, dancing/drumming circles in the streets

Getting school kids involved in a big art project in Midtown---a grant with public money

Need for reaching out to the Hispanic community

Discussion around more Hispanic themed events at UPAC with affordable ticket pricing (open house at theater to invite the community in)

### **Recruitment to the Arts District**

The need to combat the reputation of Midtown as a dangerous place

The need to combat the impression of Broadway as a thruway that divides the community

Could the city give incentives for moving to Midtown---tax breaks for a few years or offering certain houses owned by the city at a good price to artists

### **Projects**

Bank (former Bank of America) as art center/gallery

Vacant stores converted to residences

Need for exhibition spaces, such as Pop up galleries to help develop the district

Mural program with historical themes

More ethnic festivals and events